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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000281

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL/SEAS (GRICKMAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/04/2029

TAGS: PHUM KIRF PREL PGOV VE  
SUBJECT: ANTI-SEMITISM UPDATE - TENSIONS ABOUND ONE MONTH  
AFTER SYNAGOGUE ATTACK

REF: CARACAS 0184 AND PREVIOUS

CARACAS 00000281 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,  
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶11. (C) Summary: Anti-Semitism continues to be a problem in Venezuela despite the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (GBRV's) pledge to address this issue in the wake of the January 31 attack on the Caracas synagogue. On February 26, unknown assailants threw a small explosive device into a Caracas Jewish community center. No one was hurt in the incident and no group took responsibility for the attack. A government-funded orchestra almost withdrew from a production of "Fiddler on The Roof" for fear of government reprisals for participating in a show with "Jewish content." Jewish community leaders accompanying a ten-person American Jewish Committee (AJC) delegation visiting Caracas on a fact-finding mission met with the Charge March 2. They said many members of Venezuela's 15,000 Jewish community believe the problem of anti-Semitism in Venezuela will only get worse and are actively considering emigrating. Given the government's tendency to blame current ills on opposition and foreigners, it is likely that the community could continue to be targeted for harassment. End Summary.

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ATTACK ON A JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER  
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¶12. (SBU) Unknown assailants threw a small explosive like device February 26 at a Jewish community center in the affluent La Florida neighborhood of Caracas. According to the center's director, Abraham Garzon, there were no injuries or damage to the facility. Carzon said, however, "the damage is spiritual because it appears there are some people in our country that are dedicated to terrorism, something that never existed before." Immediately following the attack, GBRV officials promised to investigate and pursue those responsible for the incident.

¶13. (C) Unlike similar previous small grenade attacks against persons associated with anti-Chavez sentiments, however, this time the assailants left no pamphlets or visible propaganda behind expressing possible motives for the early morning attack. A Jewish community leader told Poloff that GBRV officials, including Foreign Minister Maduro, promptly reassured that there would be a full investigation. GBRV officials reportedly attributed the attack to extremists "beyond the government's control."

"FIDDLER ON THE ROOF" ALMOST CANCELED

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¶4. (SBU) Coincidentally, media reported on February 26 that the Gran Mariscal of Ayacucho Symphony Orchestra was considering canceling a theater production of the musical "Fiddler on the Roof." According to the local press, Michel Hausmann and Yair Rosenberg, producers responsible for bringing the musical to Caracas, received a phone call from a director of Ayacucho explaining that the cultural association received an official subsidy from the GBRV, and "since the play contained Jewish material, and the Government has declared its hostility to Israel, it was inconvenient for Ayacucho to be associated with the musical." Following a last minute scramble to attempt to replace the Gran Mariscal of Ayacucho Symphony Orchestra, the majority of the Ayacucho musicians volunteered to perform the musical as "private" musicians, and not under the official label of the Gran Mariscal of Ayacucho. The musical opened on Saturday February 28 and is currently being performed at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) in Caracas.

¶5. (SBU) According to Teodoro Petkoff, a prominent opposition figure and journalist, the decision to cancel Fiddler on the Roof did not come from orders from above. The decision to cancel the musical was actually due to Ayacucho's desire to be politically correct. Petkoff noted in a recent "Tal Cual" op-ed that "the regime of this country cannot be categorized as totalitarian; however, cases like this are beginning to appear, as symptoms of the sickness of this society." Petkoff warned readers further that "when society begins to be dominated by fear, it begins to take the road to totalitarianism, and not only in public powers but also in the controls of collective thought."

CARACAS 00000281 002.2 OF 002

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American Jewish Committee Visits Caracas

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¶6. (C) Charge' and Emboffs met March 2 with a ten-member delegation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) conducting a fact-finding trip to Venezuela. Members of the Confederation of Jewish Associations in Venezuela (CAIV) accompanied the AJC and told the Charge that many in the Jewish community of some 15,000 fear that anti-Semitism is only going to get worse in Venezuela. They noted that the Colombian government has offered to give asylum to any Venezuelan Jew who wishes to become a citizen of Colombia and urged the USG to be prepared to receive potential Venezuelan Jewish asylum-seekers. Charge explained in detail USG non-immigrant and immigrant visa procedures as well as asylum practices. CAIV members lamented that despite GBRV assurances that the government would address the Jewish community's concerns about growing anti-Semitism in Venezuela, there continued to be incidents such as the attack on the community center. CAIV members did note that there has been at least a temporary reduction of anti-Semitism in state media.

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Comment

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¶7. (C) Embassy's interlocutors in the Jewish community believe the GBRV's willingness to back-peddle from its previous levels of anti-Semitic rhetoric is in direct response to the international reaction to the synagogue attack. Regrettably, despite the GBRV's ostensible change in course, Venezuela still is plagued by a residual anti-Semitic climate. Such a climate almost certainly contributed to the attack on the Jewish community center and the absurd near-cancellation of the staging of "Fiddler on the Roof." It is also possible that the Jewish community, which is considered by and large to support the opposition, could be

the subject of greater hostilities if the government needs a convenient straw man to distract its supporters from the serious economic problems forecast for the near to medium term.

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